

## **PROGRAMS TO WATCH IN THE FEDERAL BUDGET**

### **Key Health Equity Initiatives for Latinos in Fiscal Year 2012**

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111-148) and the Health and Education Reconciliation Act (P.L. 111-152), known collectively as the Affordable Care Act, enacted policies and programs that aim to close the gaps in health for all health disparity populations, including racial and ethnic minorities. These initiatives, in combination with existing health programs, increase access to and improve quality of care and services, with an ultimate goal of reducing disease burden and health expenditures.

The fiscal year 2012 budgetary cycle will be important in the determining the fate of health equity efforts. In many cases, funding must be secured through the federal appropriations process in order to take action on these proposals. Listed below are many of the most promising programs and activities that could improve the state of health care for Latinos but do not have guaranteed funding in the federal budget. It is critical that Congress provide adequate resources to ensure that these programs can be impactful within health disparity communities.

#### **Health Equity Measures in Health Care Reform**

- 1. Data Collection**—Data collection activities can help monitor disparities within populations and pinpoint health inequalities as they develop. The Affordable Care Act requires that federally conducted or supported health care programs, activities, and surveys report on race, ethnicity, sex, primary language, and disability status. A strong investment is needed to ensure that accurate measures are developed and consistently collected.
- 2. Community Transformation Grants**—Many health disparity communities experience high rates of chronic illness and disease due to a host of factors beyond medical care. As part of national prevention efforts, Community Transformation Grants have been created to ensure that communities can develop programs and interventions that promote public health and reduction of disparities. These grants represent an immense opportunity to focus on the economic and environmental conditions that play a significant role in shaping the health status of Latinos.
- 3. Office of Minority Health (OMH)**—The Office of Minority Health’s primary aim is to reduce health disparities present in racial and ethnic minority communities. Under the new health care reform laws, OMH has an elevated role under the guidance of the Secretary of Health and Human Services. OMH will additionally provide input for national plans and initiatives that seek to eliminate health disparities as part of their goals, such as efforts to increase prevention and improve quality in health care. Funding is needed to ensure sufficient staffing of OMH so they can fulfill their obligations working on behalf of minority communities.
- 4. Education and Outreach Campaign Regarding Preventive Benefits**—A shift from “sick care” to health care was a crucial element of health care reform and one that is essential for the Latino community. Often due to access barriers, many Latinos fail to get the information

or services that would help prevent poor health conditions before they occur. This campaign, which engages in prevention and health promotion outreach, should reach all communities and be adequately funded to generate information and materials that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

5. **Community Health Centers (CHCs)**—CHCs are a major source of primary and preventive care for Latino families and children. They often provide access in areas where private and specialized care is hard to find. Health care reform generously increased mandatory (or guaranteed) funding to community health centers to help them expand to all American communities. However, a substantial proportion of the funding available to CHCs will be determined through the federal budget process.
6. **Health Care Workforce**—In many American communities, there just aren't enough family physicians, nurses, or health professionals. The Affordable Care Act made numerous investments to expand and train the health care workforce to meet the needs of growing and diverse populations. Several programs critical to building the health care workforce include:
  - Centers of Excellence
  - Cultural Competency, Prevention, and Public Health and Individuals with Disabilities Training
  - Grants to Promote the Community Health Workforce
  - Health Professions Training for Diversity
  - Healthcare Workforce Loan Repayment Program
  - Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Linkages
  - National Health Services Corps
  - Primary Care Training and Enhancement
  - Training in General, Pediatric, and Public Health Dentistry
  - Workforce Diversity Grants

## Current Health Programs

There are additional programs outside of the Affordable Care Act that help provide critical resources to address racial and ethnic disparities.

1. **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Block Grants**—These block grants provide resources to implement substance abuse prevention and treatment programs and mental health programs at the state and local levels. Funding is funneled through states, but programs and activities are often put into practice by community-based organizations that tailor the activities to the needs of their local areas. Improved funding for these block grants are especially needed in an economic downturn, when substance abuse increases and mental health is compromised in households with financial constraints.
2. **Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH)**—The REACH program supports the development of community-driven solutions that seek to reduce the incidence of chronic disease within racial and ethnic communities. Because REACH integrates a diverse and local perspective throughout planning and strategy development, many organizations in

REACH have a long-standing track record of operating effective programs in the most vulnerable and hardest-to-reach communities, even when other plans have failed.

3. **Ryan White CARE Act Minority AIDS Initiative**—For more than a decade, the Minority AIDS Initiative has helped community-based organizations and nonprofits build their capacity to address the disproportionate effects of HIV/AIDS within racial and ethnic minority communities.
4. **Health Care Workforce**—Though many health workforce provisions were supported in health care reform, there are several existing programs that educate and train in diverse professions for a high-quality health workforce that should also be addressed within the federal budget. Most specifically:
  - Nursing Workforce Diversity
  - Health Careers Opportunity Program
  - Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students

Inequality in health care puts a major burden on the U.S. health care system. The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies has found that \$294 billion of direct medical expenses could have been eradicated between 2003 and 2006 if health care disparities within racial and ethnic minority communities were eliminated. Even without accounting for indirect costs, such as lost work productivity, these excess costs far surpass the levels of funding needed to provide robust infrastructure to implement health equity programs. The fiscal year 2012 budget should reflect these priorities in the months ahead.